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C
Phillips

Presented
By

F. E. Abbot

WENDELL PHILLIPS

BY

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

WENDELL PHILLIPS

A EULOGY

DELIVERED BEFORE THE MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES OF BOSTON, MASS.

APRIL 18TH, 1884

BY

GEORGE WILLIAM CURTIS

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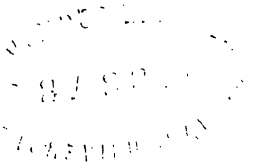

EULOGY.

MASSACHUSETTS is always rich in fitting voices to commemorate the virtues and services of her illustrious citizens, and in every strain of affectionate admiration and thoughtful discrimination, the legislature, the pulpit, and the press—his old associates, who saw the glory of his prime—the younger generation which cherishes the tradition of his devoted life, have spoken the praise of Wendell Phillips. But his native city has justly thought that the great work of his life was not local or limited; that it was as large as liberty and as broad as humanity, and that his name, therefore, is not the treasure of a State only, but a national possession. An orator whose consecrated eloquence, like the music of Amphion raising the wall of Thebes, was a chief force in giving to the American Union the impregnable defence of freedom, is a common benefactor; the West may well answer to the East, the South to the North, and Carolina and California, Minnesota and New York, mingle their sorrow with that of New England, and own in his death a common bereavement.

At other times, with every mournful ceremony of respect, the commonwealth and its chief city have lament-

ed their dead sons, conspicuous party leaders, who, in high official place, and with the formal commission of the State, have worthily maintained the ancient renown and the lofty faith of Massachusetts. But it is a private citizen whom we commemorate to-day, yet a public leader; a man always foremost in political controversy, but who held no office, and belonged to no political party; who swayed votes, but who seldom voted, and never for a mere party purpose; and who, for the larger part of his active life, spurned the Constitution as a bond of iniquity, and the Union as a yoke of oppression. Yet, the official authority which decrees this commemoration—this great assembly which honors his memory—the press, which from sea to sea has celebrated his name—and I, who at your summons stand here to speak his eulogy, are all loyal to party, all revere the Constitution and maintain the Union, all hold the ballot to be the most sacred trust, and voting to be the highest duty of the citizen. As we recall the story of that life, the spectacle of to-day is one of the most significant in our history. This memorial rite is not a tribute to official service, to literary genius, to scientific distinction; it is homage to personal character. It is the solemn public declaration that a life of transcendent purity of purpose, blended with commanding powers, devoted with absolute unselfishness, and with amazing results, to the welfare of the country and of humanity, is, in the American republic, an example so inspiring, a patriotism so lofty, and a public service so beneficent,

that, in contemplating them, discordant opinions, differing judgments, and the sharp sting of controversial speech, vanish like frost in a flood of sunshine. It is not the Samuel Adams who was impatient of Washington, and who doubted the Constitution, but the Samuel Adams of Faneuil Hall, of the Committee of Correspondence, of Concord and Lexington—Samuel Adams, the father of the Revolution, whom Massachusetts and America remember and revere.

The revolutionary tradition was the native air of Wendell Phillips. When he was born in this city, seventy-three years ago last November, some of the chief revolutionary figures still lingered. John Adams was living at Quincy, and Thomas Jefferson at Monticello; Elbridge Gerry was Governor of the State, James Madison was President, and the second war with England was at hand. Phillips was nine years old when, in 1820, the most important debate after the adoption of the Constitution, the debate of whose tumultuous culmination and triumphant close he was to be the great orator, began, and the second heroic epoch of our history, in which he was a master figure, opened in the long and threatening contest over the admission of Missouri. Unheeding the transactions which were shaking the land and setting the scene of his career, the young boy, of the best New England lineage and prospects, played upon Beacon Hill, and at the age of sixteen entered Harvard College. His classmates recall his manly pride and reserve, with the charming man-

ner, the delightful conversation, and the affluence of kindly humor, which was never lost. He sauntered and gently studied; not a devoted student, not in the bent of his mind, nor in the special direction of sympathy, forecasting the reformer, but already the orator and the easy master of the college platform; and still, in the memory of his old companions, he walks those college paths in unfading youth, a figure of patrician port, of sovereign grace—a prince coming to his kingdom.

The tranquil years at the university ended, and he graduated in 1831, the year of Nat. Turner's insurrection in Virginia; the year, also, in which Mr. Garrison issued the *Liberator*, and, for unequivocally proclaiming the principle of the Declaration of Independence was denounced as a public enemy. Like other gently nurtured Boston boys, Phillips began the study of law, and, as it proceeded, doubtless the sirens sang to him, as to the noble youth of every country and time. If, musing over Coke and Blackstone, in the full consciousness of ample powers and of fortunate opportunities, he sometimes forecast the future, he doubtless saw himself succeeding Fisher Ames, and Harrison Gray Otis, and Daniel Webster, rising from the Bar to the Legislature, from the Legislature to the Senate, from the Senate—who knew whither?—the idol of society, the applauded orator, the brilliant champion of the elegant repose and the cultivated conservatism of Massachusetts. The delight of social ease, the refined enjoyment

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WENDELL PHILLIPS

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it had seen one after another of those societies disband, until it was left almost alone to mourn the universal apathy. When Wendell Phillips was admitted to the bar in 1834, the slave interest in the United States, entrenched in the Constitution, in trade, in the church, in society, in historic tradition, and in the prejudice of race, had already become, although unconsciously to the country, one of the most powerful forces in the world. The English throne in 1625, the old French monarchy in 1780, the English aristocracy at the beginning of the century, were not so strong as slavery in this country fifty years ago. The grasp of England upon the American colonies before the Revolution was not so sure, and was never so menacing to liberty upon this continent, as the grasp of slavery upon the Union in the pleasant days when the young lawyer sat in his office careless of the anti-slavery agitation, and jesting with his old college comrades over the clients who did not come.

But on an October afternoon in 1835, while he was still sitting expectant in his office, the long-awaited client came, but in what an amazing form! The young lawyer was especially a Boston boy. He loved his native city with that lofty pride and intensity of local affection which are peculiar to her citizens. "I was born in Boston," he said long afterward, "and the good name of the old town is bound up with every fibre of my heart." In the mild afternoon his windows were open and the sound of unusual disturbance drew

him from his office. He hastened along the street, and suddenly, a stone's-throw from the scene of the Boston Massacre, in the very shadow of the old State-House, he beheld in Boston a spectacle which Boston cannot now conceive. He saw American women insulted for befriending their innocent sisters, whose children were sold from their arms. He saw an American citizen assailed by a furious mob in the city of James Otis, for saying, with James Otis, that a man's right to liberty is inherent and inalienable. Himself a citizen soldier, he looked to see the majesty of the people maintaining the authority of law; but, to his own startled surprise, he saw that the rightful defenders of law against the mob were themselves the mob. The city whose dauntless free speech had taught a country how to be independent he saw raising a parricidal hand against its parent—Liberty. It was enough. As the jail doors closed upon Garrison to save his life, Garrison and his cause had won their most powerful and renowned ally. With the setting of that October sun vanished forever the career of prosperous ease, the gratification of ordinary ambition, which the genius and the accomplishment of Wendell Phillips had seemed to foretell. Yes, the long-awaited client had come at last. Scarred, scorned, and forsaken, that cowering and friendless client was wronged and degraded humanity. The great soul saw and understood.

"So nigh is grandeur to our dust,
So near is God to man,
When duty whispers low, *Thou must*,
The youth replies, *I can*."

Already the Boston boy felt what he afterward said: "I love inexpressibly these streets of Boston, over which my mother led my baby feet, and if God grants me time enough I will make them too pure for the footsteps of a slave." And we, fellow-citizens, who recall the life and the man, the untiring sacrifice, the complete surrender, do we not hear in the soft air of that long-vanished October day, far above the riot of the stormy street, the benediction that he could not hear, but whose influence breathed always from the ineffable sweetness of his smile and the gracious courtesy of his manner, "Inasmuch as thou hast done it to the least of these my brethren, thou hast done it unto me."

The scene of that day is an illustration of the time. As we look back upon it, it is incredible. But it was not until Lovejoy fell, while defending his press at Alton, in November, 1837, that an American citizen was killed by a raging mob for declaring, in a free State, the right of innocent men and women to their personal liberty. This tragedy, like the deadly blow at Charles Sumner in the Senate Chamber, twenty years afterward, awed the whole country with a sense of vast and momentous peril. The country has just been startled by the terrible riot at Cincinnati, which sprang from the public consciousness that by crafty legal quibbling crime had become secure. But the outbreak was at once and universally condemned, because, in this country, whatever the wrong may be, reform

by riot is always worse than the wrong. The Alton riot, however, had no redeeming impulse. It was the very frenzy of lawlessness, a sudden and ghastly glimpse of the unquenchable fires of passion that were burning under the seeming peace and prosperity of the Union. How fierce and far-reaching those passions were, was seen not only in the riot itself, but in the refusal of Faneuil Hall for a public meeting to denounce the appalling wrong to American liberty which had been done in Illinois, lest the patriotic protest of the meeting should be interpreted by the country as the voice of Boston. But the refusal was reconsidered, and never since the people of Boston thronged Faneuil Hall on the day after the massacre in State Street, had that ancient hall seen a more solemn and significant assembly. It was the more solemn, the more significant, because the excited multitude was no longer, as in the revolutionary day, inspired by one unanimous and overwhelming purpose to assert and maintain liberty of speech as the bulwark of all other liberty. It was an unwonted and foreboding scene. An evil spirit was in the air.

When the seemly protest against the monstrous crime had been spoken, and the proper duty of the day was done, a voice was heard, the voice of the high officer solemnly sworn to prosecute in the name of Massachusetts every violation of law, declaring, in Faneuil Hall, sixty years after the battle of Bunker Hill, and amid a howling storm of applause, that an Amer-

ican citizen who was put to death by a mad crowd of his fellow-citizens for defending his right of free speech, died as the fool dieth. Boston has seen dark days, but never a moment so dark as that. Seven years before, Webster had said, in the famous words that Massachusetts binds as frontlets between her eyes, "There are Boston and Concord, and Lexington and Bunker Hill, and there they will remain forever." Had they already vanished? Was the spirit of the Revolution quite extinct? In the very Cradle of Liberty did no son survive to awake its slumbering echoes? By the grace of God such a son there was. He had come with the multitude, and he had heard with sympathy and approval the speeches that condemned the wrong; but when the cruel voice justified the murderers of Lovejoy, the heart of the young man burned within him. This speech, he said to himself, must be answered. As the malign strain proceeded, the Boston boy, all on fire, with Concord and Lexington tugging at his heart, unconsciously murmured, "Such a speech in Faneuil Hall must be answered in Faneuil Hall." "Why not answer it yourself?" whispered a neighbor, who overheard him. "Help me to the platform and I will"—and pushing and struggling through the dense and threatening crowd, the young man reached the platform, was lifted upon it, and, advancing to speak, was greeted with a roar of hostile cries. But riding the whirlwind undismayed, as for many a year afterward he directed the same wild storm, he stood upon the

platform in all the beauty and grace of imperial youth —the Greeks would have said a god descended—and in words that touched the mind and heart and conscience of that vast multitude, as with fire from heaven, recalling Boston to herself, he saved his native city and her cradle of liberty from the damning disgrace of stoning the first martyr in the great struggle for personal freedom. "Mr. Chairman," he said, "when I heard the gentleman lay down principles which placed the rioters, incendiaries, and murderers of Alton, side by side with Otis and Hancock, and Quincy and Adams, I thought those pictured lips would have broken into voice to rebuke the recreant American—the slanderer of the dead." And even as he spoke the vision was fulfilled. Once more its native music rang through Faneuil Hall. In the orator's own burning words, those pictured lips did break into immortal rebuke. In Wendell Phillips, glowing with holy indignation at the insult to America and to man, John Adams and James Otis, Josiah Quincy and Samuel Adams, though dead, yet spake.

In the annals of American speech, there had been no such scene since Patrick Henry's electrical warning to George the Third. It was that greatest of oratorical triumphs when a supreme emotion, a sentiment which is to mould a people anew, lifted the orator to adequate expression. Three such scenes are illustrious in our history. That of the speech of Patrick Henry at Williamsburg, of Wendell Phillips in Faneuil Hall, of

Abraham Lincoln in Gettysburg—three, and there is no fourth. They transmit, unextinguished, the torch of an eloquence which has aroused nations and changed the course of history, and which Webster called "noble, sublime, god-like action." The tremendous controversy indeed, inspired universal eloquence. As the cause passed from the moral appeal of the Abolitionists to the political action of the Liberty party, of the conscience Whigs and the Free-Soil Democrats, and finally of the Republican party, the sound of speech, which in its variety and excellence had never been heard upon the continent, filled the air. But supreme over it all was the eloquence of Phillips, as over the harmonious tumult of a great orchestra, one clear voice, like a lark high poised in heaven, steadily carries the melody. As Demosthenes was the orator of Greece against Philip, and Cicero of Rome against Catiline, and John Pym of England against the Stuart despotism, Wendell Phillips was distinctively the orator, as others were the statesmen, of the anti-slavery cause.

When he first spoke at Faneuil Hall, some of the most renowned American orators were still in their prime. Webster and Clay were in the Senate, Choate at the bar, Edward Everett upon the Academic platform. From all these orators Phillips differed more than they differed from each other. Behind Webster and Everett and Clay there was always a great organized party or an entrenched conservatism of feeling and opinion. They spoke accepted views. They

moved with masses of men, and were sure of the applause of party spirit, of political tradition, and of established institutions. Phillips stood alone. He was not a Whig nor a Democrat, nor the graceful panegyrist of an undisputed situation. Both parties denounced him. He must recruit a new party. Public opinion condemned him. He must win public opinion to achieve his purpose. The tone, the method of the new orator, announced a new spirit. It was not a heroic story of the last century, nor the contention of contemporary politics; it was the unsuspected heroism of a mightier controversy that breathed and burned in his words. With no party behind him, and denouncing established order and acknowledged tradition, his speech was necessarily a popular appeal for a strange and unwelcome cause, and the condition of its success was that it should both charm and rouse the hearer, while, under cover of the fascination, the orator unfolded his argument and urged his plea. This condition the genius of the orator instinctively perceived, and it determined the character of his discourse.

He faced his audience with a tranquil mien, and a beaming aspect that was never dimmed. He spoke, and in the measured cadence of his quiet voice there was intense feeling, but no declamation, no passionate appeal, no superficial and feigned emotion. It was simple colloquy—a gentleman conversing. Unconsciously and surely the ear and heart were charmed. How was it done?—Ah! how did Mozart do it, how

Raphael? The secret of the rose's sweetness, of the bird's ecstasy, of the sunset's glory—that is the secret of genius and of eloquence. What was heard, what was seen, was the form of noble manhood, the courteous and self-possessed tone, the flow of modulated speech, sparkling with matchless richness of illustration, with apt allusion, and happy anecdote and historic parallel, with wit and pitiless invective, with melodious pathos, with stinging satire, with crackling epigram and limpid humor, the bright ripples that play around the sure and steady prow of the resistless ship. Like an illuminated vase of odors, he glowed with concentrated and perfumed fire. The divine energy of his conviction utterly possessed him, and his

> "Pure and eloquent blood
> Spoke in his cheek, and so distinctly wrought,
> That one might almost say his body thought."

Was it Pericles swaying the Athenian multitude? Was it Apollo breathing the music of the morning from his lips?—No, no! It was an American patriot, a modern son of liberty, with a soul as firm and as true as was ever consecrated to unselfish duty, pleading with the American conscience for the chained and speechless victims of American inhumanity.

How terribly earnest was the anti-slavery contest this generation little knows. But to understand Phillips we must recall the situation of the country. When he joined the Abolitionists, and for more than twenty years afterward, Slavery sat supreme in the

White House, and made laws in the Capitol. Courts of Justice were its ministers and Legislatures its lackeys. It silenced the preacher in the pulpit, it muzzled the editor at his desk, and the professor in his lecture-room. It set a price upon the head of peaceful citizens, robbed the mails, and denounced the vital principle of the Declaration of Independence as treason. In States whose laws did not tolerate slavery, Slavery ruled the club and the drawing-room, the factory and the office, swaggered at the dinner-table, and scourged, with scorn, a cowardly society. It tore the golden rule from school-books, and from the prayer-book the pictured benignity of Christ. It prohibited in the free States schools for the hated race, and hunted women who taught children to read. It forbade a free people to communicate with their representatives, seized territory to extend its area and confirm its sovereignty, and plotted to steal more to make its empire impregnable and the free Republic of the United States impossible. Scholars, divines, men and women in every church, in every party, raised individual voices in earnest protest. They sighed against a hurricane. There had been such protest in the country for two centuries—colonial provisions and restrictions — the fiery voice of Whitfield in the South — the calm persuasion of Woolman in the middle colonies — the heroism of Hopkins in Rhode Island—the eloquence of Rush in Pennsylvania. There had been Emancipation Societies at the North and at the South—arguments and appeals and threats

in the Congress of the Confederation—in the Constitutional Convention — in the Congress of the Union; there had been the words and the will of Washington, the warning of Jefferson, the consenting testimony of the revered fathers of the Government; always the national conscience somewhere silently pleading, always the finger of the world steadily pointing in scorn. But here, after all the protest and the rebuke and the endeavor, was the malign power, which, when the Constitution was formed, had been but the shrinking Afrite bound in the casket, now towering and resistless. He had kicked his casket into the sea, and, haughtily defying the conscience of the country and the moral sentiment of mankind, demanded absolute control of the Republic as the price of union—the Republic, anxious only to submit and to call submission statesmanship.

If, then, the work of the Revolution was to be saved, and independent America was to become free America, the first and paramount necessity was to arouse the country. Agitation was the duty of the hour. Garrison was certainly not the first Abolitionist; no, nor was Luther the first Protestant. But Luther brought all the wandering and separate rays of protest to a focus, and kindled the contest for religious freedom. So, when Garrison flung full in the face of Slavery the defiance of immediate and complete Abolition, Slavery, instinctively foreseeing its doom, sprang to its feet, and joined, with the heroism of despair, in the death-grapple with Liberty, from which, after a

generation, Liberty arose unbruised and victorious. It is hard for the survivors of a generation to which Abolitionist was a word suggesting the most odious fanaticism—a furious declamation at once nonsensical and dangerous, a grotesque and sanctimonious playing with fire in a powder-magazine—to believe that the names of the two representative Abolitionists will be written with a sunbeam, as Phillips says of Toussaint, high over many an honored name. But history, looking before and after, readjusts contemporary judgments of men and events. In all the essential qualities of heroic action, Luther, nailing his challenge to the Church upon the church's own door, when the Church was supreme in Europe—William Tell, in the romantic legend, serenely scorning to bow to the cap of Gesler, when Gesler's troops held all the market-place—are not nobler figures than Garrison and Phillips, in the hour of the complete possession of the country by the power of slavery, demanding immediate and unconditional emancipation. A tone of apology, of deprecation or regret, no more becomes an American in speaking of the Abolitionists than in speaking of the Sons of Liberty in the Revolution, and every tribute of honor and respect which we gladly pay to the illustrious fathers of American independence is paid as worthily to their sons, the pioneers of American freedom.

That freedom was secured, indeed, by the union of many forces. The abolition movement was moral agi-

tation. It was a voice crying in the wilderness. As an American movement it was reproached for holding aloof from the American political method. But in the order of time the moral awakening precedes political action. Politics are founded in compromise and expediency, and had the abolition leaders paused to parley with prejudice and interest and personal ambition, in order to smooth and conciliate and persuade, their duty would have been undone. When the alarm-bell at night has brought the aroused citizens to the street, they will organize their action. But the ringer of the bell betrays his trust when he ceases to startle. To vote was to acknowledge the Constitution. To acknowledge the Constitution was to offer a premium upon slavery by granting more political power for every slave. It was to own an obligation to return innocent men to unspeakable degradation, and to shoot them down if, with a thousandfold greater reason than our fathers, they resisted oppression. Could Americans do this? Could honest men do this? Could a great country do this, and not learn, sooner or later, by ghastly experience, the truth which George Mason proclaimed —that Providence punishes national sins by national calamities? The Union, said Wendell Phillips, with a calmness that enchanted while it appalled—the Union is called the very ark of the American covenant; but has not idolatry of the Union been the chief bulwark of slavery, and in the words and deeds and spirit of the most vehement "Union saviours" who denounce

agitation, can any hope of emancipation be descried? If, then, under the sacred charter of the Union, Slavery has grown to this stupendous height, throwing the shadow of death over the land, is not the Union as it exists the foe of Liberty, and can we honestly affirm that it is the sole surviving hope of freedom in the world? Long ago the great leaders of our parties hushed their voices, and whispered that even to speak of slavery was to endanger the Union. Is not this enough? Sons of Otis and of Adams, of Franklin and of Jay, are we ready for union upon the ruins of freedom? *Delenda Carthago! Delenda Carthago!*

Even while he spoke there sprang up around him the marshalled host of an organized political party, which, raising the Constitution as a banner of freedom, marched to the polls to make the Union the citadel of Liberty. He, indeed, had rejected the Constitution and the Union, as the bulwark of slavery. But he and the political host, widely differing, had yet a common purpose, and were confounded in a common condemnation. And who shall count the voters in that political army, and who the generous heroes of the actual war, in whose young hearts his relentless denunciation of the Union had bred the high resolve that, under the protection of the Constitution and by its own lawful power, the slave Union which he denounced should be dissolved in the fervid glory of a new Union of freedom? His plea, indeed, did not persuade his friends, and was furiously spurned by his foes. "Hang Phil-

lips and Yancey together, hang the Abolitionist and the fire-eater, and we shall have peace," cried mingled wrath and terror, as the absorbing debate deepened toward civil war. But still, through the startling flash and over the thunder-peal with which the tempest burst, that cry rang out undismayed, *Delenda Carthago!*—The awful storm has rolled away. The warning voice is stilled forever. But the slave Union whose destruction he sought is dissolved, and the glorious Union of freedom and equal rights, which his soul desired, is the blessed Union of to-day.

It is an idle speculation, fellow-citizens, to what or to whom chiefly belonged the glory of emancipation. It is like the earlier questions of the Revolution: Who first proposed the Committee on Correspondence? Who first hinted resistance? Who first spoke of possible independence? It is enough that there was a noble emulation of generous patriotism, and happy history forbears to decide. Doubtless, the Minute Men fired the first organized shot of the Revolution. But it was Paul Revere, riding alone at midnight and arousing Middlesex, one hundred and nine years ago to-night, that brought the Massachusetts farmers to stand embattled on Lexington Green and Concord Bridge.

For his great work of arousing the country and piercing the national conscience Phillips was especially fitted, not only by the commanding will and genius of the orator, but by the profound sincerity of his

faith in the people. The party leaders of his time had a qualified faith in the people. His was unqualified. To many of his fellow-citizens it seemed mad, quixotic, whimsical, or merely feigned. To some of them, even now, he appears to have been only an eloquent demagogue. But his life is the reply. To no act of his, to no private advantage sought or gained, to no use of his masterly power except to promote purposes which he believed to be essential to the public welfare, could they ever point who charged him with base motives or personal ends. No man, indeed, can take a chief part in tumultuous national controversy without encountering misjudgment and reproach and unmeasured condemnation. But it does not affect the lofty patriotism of the American Revolution that Adam Smith believed it to be stimulated by the vanity of colonial shopkeepers. It does not dim the lustre of the Methodist revival of religious sentiment in England that the bishops branded it as a vulgar and ignorant enthusiasm. Wendell Phillips held, with John Bright, that the first five hundred men who pass in the Strand would make as good a Parliament as that which sits at St. Stephen's. A student of history, and a close observer of men, he rejected that fear of the multitude which springs from the feeling that the many are ignorant while the few are wise; and he believed the saying, too profound for Talleyrand, to whom it is ascribed, that everybody knows more than anybody. The great argument for popular government is not the essential

righteousness of a majority, but the celestial law which subordinates the brute force of numbers to intellectual and moral ascendency, as the immeasurable floods of ocean follow the moon. Undisturbed by the most rancorous hostility, as in the meetings at the Music Hall in this city in the winter of secession, he looked calmly at the mob, and behind the drunken Philip he saw Philip the King.

The huge wrongs and crimes in the annals of the race, the wars that have wasted the world and desolated mankind, he knew to be the work of the crowned and ruling minority, not of the mass of the people. The companion of his boyhood and his college classmate, Motley, with generous sympathy and vivid touch, that gave new beauty to the old heroic story, had shown that not from the palace of Charles the Fifth, not from luxurious Versailles, but from the huts of Dutch islanders, scattered along the hard coast of the North Sea, came the genius of Liberty to rescue modern Europe from hopeless despotism. Nay, with his own eyes, saddened and surprised, Phillips saw that, in the immediate presence of a monstrous and perilous wrong to human nature, prosperous and comfortable America angrily refused to hear; and that while Humanity lay bruised and bleeding by the way, the polished society of the most enlightened city in the Union passed by disdainful on the other side.

But while he cherished this profound faith in the people, and because he cherished it, he never flattered

the mob, nor hung upon its neck, nor pandered to its passion, nor suffered its foaming hate or its exulting enthusiasm to touch the calm poise of his regnant soul. Those who were eager to insult and deride and silence him when he pleaded for the negro, wept and shouted and rapturously crowned him when he paid homage to O'Connell, and made O'Connell's cause his own. But the crowd did not follow him with huzzas. He moved in solitary majesty, and if from his smooth speech a lightning flash of satire or of scorn struck a cherished lie or an honored character or a dogma of the party creed, and the crowd burst into a furious tempest of dissent, he beat it into silence with uncompromising iteration. If it tried to drown his voice, he turned to the reporters, and over the raging tumult calmly said, "Howl on, I speak to thirty millions here."

There was another power in his speech sharper than in the speech of any other American orator, an unsparing invective. The abolition appeal was essentially iconoclastic, and the method of a reformer at close quarters with a mighty system of wrong cannot be measured by the standards of cool and polite debate. Phillips did not shrink from the sternest denunciation or ridicule or scorn of those who seemed to him recreant to freedom and humanity, however enshrined they might be in public admiration, with whatever official dignity invested, with whatever softer graces of accomplishment endowed. The idols of a purely conventional virtue he delighted to shatter, because no public

enemy seemed to him more deadly than the American who made moral cowardice respectable. He felt that the complacent conformity of northern communities was the strength of slavery, and the man who would return a fugitive slave, or with all the resources of sophistry defend his return, upon a plea of constitutional obligation, was, in his view, a man who would do an act of cruel wickedness to-day to avoid a vague and possible mischance hereafter. If the plea were sound in the case of one man—if one innocent man was to be an outcast from protecting laws, from effective sympathy, and from humanity, because he had been unspeakably wronged—then it was as sound in the case of every such man, and the Union and the Constitution rested upon three million crimes. Was this endurable? Should an offence so inhuman as deliberate obedience to laws which compelled a man to do to another what he would not hesitate, amid the applause of all men, to kill that other for attempting to do to him—should such an offence be condoned by courteous admonition and hesitating doubt? Should the partiality of friendship, should the learning, renown, or public service of the offender, save him from the pillory of public scorn? If Patrick Henry made the country ring with the name of the dishonest contractor in the war, should the name of the educated American who conspires with the slaveholders against the slave be too sacred for obloquy? No epithet is too blistering for John Brown, who takes his life in his hand that he may break the

chain of the slave. Shall the gentleman whose compliance weakens the moral fibre of New England, and fastens the slave's chain more hopelessly, go unwhipped of a single word of personal rebuke? Such questions he did not ask, but they ask themselves, as to-day we turn the pages that still quiver with his blasting words, and recall the mortal strife in which he stood. Doubtless his friends, who knew that well-spring of sweet waters, his heart, and who, like him, were sealed to the service of emancipation, sometimes grieved and recoiled amazed from his terrible arraignment. He knew the penalty of his course. He paid it cheerfully. But history will record that the orator who, in that supreme exigency of liberty, pitilessly whipped by name the aiders and abettors of the crime against humanity, made such complicity in every intelligent community infinitely more arduous, and so served mankind, public virtue, and the State.

But more than this. The avowed and open opponents of the anti-slavery agitation could not justly complain of his relentless pursuit. From them he received the blows that in turn he did not spare. But others, his friends, soldiers of the same army, although in other divisions and upon a different route, marching against the same foe—did they, too, feel those shafts of fire? How many a Massachusetts man, whose name the commonwealth will canonize with his, loyal with his own fidelity to the common cause, he sometimes taunted as recreant and scourged as laggard! How

many leaders in other States, statesmen beloved and revered, who in other ways than his fought the battle of liberty with firmness in the right, as God gave them to see the right, and who live in national gratitude and among the great in history forevermore, did not those dauntless lips seem sometimes cruelly to malign! "Blame not this plainness of speech," he said; "I have a hundred friends, as brave souls as God ever made, whose hearths are not as safe after honored men make such speeches." He knew that his ruthless words closed to him homes of friendship and hearts of sympathy. He saw the amazement, he heard the condemnation; but, like the great apostle preaching Christ, he knew only Humanity, and Humanity crucified. Tongue of the dumb, eyes of the blind, feet of the lame, his voice alone, among the voices that were everywhere heard and heeded, was sent by God to challenge every word or look or deed that seemed to him possibly to palliate oppression or to comfort the oppressor. Divinely commissioned, he was not, indeed, to do injustice; but the human heart is very patient with the hero who, in his strenuous and sublime conflict, if sometimes he does not clearly see and sometimes harshly judges, yet, in all his unsparing assault, deals never a blow of malice nor of envy nor of personal gratification—the warrior who grasps at no prizes for which others strive, and whose unselfish peace no laurels of Miltiades disturb.

For a quarter of a century this was the career of

Wendell Phillips. His life had no events; his speeches were its only incidents. No public man could pass from us whose death, like his, would command universal attention, whose story would not display a splendid list of special achievements, of various official services, as of treaties skilfully negotiated, of legislative measures wisely adjusted, of imposing professional triumphs, of devoted party following, of an immense personal association, such as our ordinary political controversy and the leadership of genius and eloquence produce. But that official participation in political action and that peculiar personal contact with society were wanting in the life of Wendell Phillips. How strong, indeed, his moral ascendency over the public mind, how warm the admiration, how fond the affection, in which, at a little distance, and as became the supreme reserve of his nature, he was held, let this scene, like that of his burial, bear witness. But during the long crusade of his life he was the most solitary of eminent American figures. In the general course of affairs he took little part. He had no share in the conduct of the associations for every purpose, scientific, literary, charitable, moral or other, with which every American community abounds. In ordinary society, at the club and the public dinner, at the assembly and upon the ceremonial occasion, he was as unknown as in legislative halls or in public offices. Partly it was that reserve, partly that method of his public speech withheld him; partly he felt the air of

social complaisance, like the compromising atmosphere of legislatures, to be unfriendly to the spirit and objects of his life, and partly his liberal hand preferred to give where there could be no return. Yet, in the political arena, had he cared to engage, no man was more amply equipped than he, by natural powers and taste and adaptation, by special study and familiarity with history and literature, by exquisite tact and gay humor and abounding affability, by all the qualities that in public life make a great party leader, a leader honored and beloved. And in that other circle, that "elevated sphere" in which Marie Antoinette appeared, "glittering like the morning-star, full of life and splendor and joy," that decorated world of social refinement into which he was born, there would have been no more fascinating or courtly figure, could he have foreborne the call of conscience, the duty of his life.

When the war ended, and the specific purpose of his relentless agitation was accomplished, Phillips was still in the prime of life. Had his mind recurred to the dreams of earlier years—had he desired, in the fulness of his fame and the maturity of his powers, to turn to the political career which the hopes of the friends of his youth had forecast—I do not doubt that the Massachusetts of Sumner and of Andrew, proud of his genius and owning his immense service to the triumphant cause—although a service beyond the party line, and often apparently directed against the party

itself—would have gladly summoned him to duty. It would, indeed, have been a kind of peerage for this great Commoner. But not to repose and peaceful honors did his earnest soul incline. "Now that the field is won," he said gayly to a friend, "do you sit by the camp-fire, but I will put out into the underbrush." The slave, indeed, was free, but emancipation did not free the agitator from his task. The client that suddenly appeared before him on that memorable October day was not an oppressed race alone—it was wronged Humanity; it was the victim of unjust systems and unequal laws; it was the poor man, the weak man, the unfortunate man, whoever and wherever he might be. This was the cause that he would still plead in the forum of public opinion. "Let it not be said," he wrote to a meeting of his old abolition comrades, two months before his death, "that the old Abolitionist stopped with the negro, and was never able to see that the same principles claimed his utmost effort to protect all labor, white and black, and to further the discussion of every claim of humanity."

Was this the habit of mere agitation, the restless discontent that follows great achievement? There were those who thought so. But they were critics of a temperament which did not note that with Phillips agitation was a principle, and a deliberately chosen method to definite ends. There were still vast questions springing from the same root of selfishness and injustice as the question of slavery. They must force

a hearing in the same way. He would not adopt in middle life the career of politics, which he had renounced in youth, however seductive that career might be, whatever its opportunities and rewards; because the purpose had grown with his growth and strengthened with his strength, to form public opinion rather than to represent it in making or in executing the laws. To form public opinion upon vital public questions by public discussion—but by public discussion absolutely fearless and sincere, and conducted with honest faith in the people to whom the argument was addressed—this was the chosen task of his life; this was the public service which he had long performed, and this he would still perform, and in the familiar way.

His comprehensive philanthropy had made him, even during the anti-slavery contest, the untiring advocate of other great reforms. His powerful presentation of the justice and reason of the political equality of women, at Worcester, in 1851, more than any other single impulse, launched that question upon the sea of popular controversy. In the general statement of principle nothing has been added to that discourse; in vivid and effective eloquence of advocacy it has never been surpassed. All the arguments for independence echoed John Adams in the Continental Congress. All the pleas for applying the American principle of representation to the wives and mothers of American citizens echo the eloquence of Wendell Phil-

lips at Worcester. His, also, was the voice that summoned the temperance voters of the commonwealth to stand up and be counted; the voice which resolutely and definitely exposed the crime to which the busy American mind and conscience are at last turning, the American crime against the Indians. Through him the sorrow of Crete, the tragedy of Ireland, pleaded with America. In the terrible experience of the early anti-slavery debate, when the Church and refined society seemed to be the rampart of Slavery, he had learned profound distrust of that conservatism of prosperity which chills human sympathy and narrows the conscience. So, the vast combinations of capital in these later days, with their immense monopolies and imperial power, seemed to him sure to corrupt the government, and to obstruct and threaten the real welfare of the people. He felt, therefore, that what is called the respectable class is often, really—but unconsciously and with a generous purpose, not justly estimating its own tendency—the dangerous class. He was not a party politician; he cared little for parties or for party leaders. But any political party which, in his judgment, represented the dangerous tendency, was a party to be defeated in the interest of the peace and progress of all the people.

But his judgment, always profoundly sincere, was it not sometimes profoundly mistaken? No nobler friend of freedom and of man than Wendell Phillips ever breathed upon this continent, and no man's service

to freedom surpasses his. But before the war he demanded peaceful disunion—yet it was the Union in arms that saved Liberty. During the war he would have superseded Lincoln—but it was Lincoln who freed the slaves. He pleaded for Ireland, tortured by centuries of misrule—and while every generous heart followed with sympathy the pathos and the power of his appeal, the just mind recoiled from the sharp arraignment of the truest friends in England that Ireland ever had. I know it all; but I know also, and history will remember, that the slave Union which he denounced is dissolved; that it was the heart and conscience of the nation, exalted by his moral appeal of agitation, as well as by the enthusiasm of patriotic war, which held up the hands of Lincoln, and upon which Lincoln leaned in emancipating the slaves; and that only by indignant and aggressive appeals like his has the heart of England ever opened to Irish wrong.

No man, I say, can take a pre-eminent and effective part in contentions that shake nations, or in the discussion of great national policies, of foreign relations, of domestic economy and finance, without keen reproach and fierce misconception. "But death," says Bacon, "bringeth good fame." Then, if moral integrity remain unsoiled, the purpose pure, blameless the life, and patriotism as shining as the sun, conflicting views and differing counsels disappear, and, firmly fixed upon character and actual achievement, good fame rests secure. Eighty years ago, in this city, how unsparing was the denunci-

ation of John Adams for betraying and ruining his party; for his dogmatism, his vanity, and ambition; for his exasperating impracticability—he, the Colossus of the Revolution! And Thomas Jefferson—I may truly say what the historian says of the Saracen mothers and Richard Cœur de Lion, that the mothers of Boston hushed their children with fear of the political devil incarnate of Virginia. But when the drapery of mourning shrouded the columns and overhung the arches of Faneuil Hall, Daniel Webster did not remember that sometimes John Adams was imprudent, and Thomas Jefferson sometimes unwise. He remembered only that John Adams and Thomas Jefferson were two of the greatest of American patriots—and their fellow-citizens of every party bowed their heads and said Amen. I am not here to declare that the judgment of Wendell Phillips was always sound, nor his estimate of men always just, nor his policy always approved by the event. He would have scorned such praise. I am not here to eulogize the mortal, but the immortal. He, too, was a great American patriot; and no American life—no, not one—offers to future generations of his countrymen a more priceless example of inflexible fidelity to conscience and to public duty; and no American more truly than he purged the national name of its shame, and made the American flag the flag of hope for mankind.

Among her noblest children his native city will cherish him, and gratefully recall the unbending Puritan

soul that dwelt in a form so gracious and urbane. The plain house in which he lived—severely plain, because the welfare of the suffering and the slave were preferred to book and picture and every fair device of art; the house to which the North Star led the trembling fugitive, and which the unfortunate and the friendless knew; the radiant figure passing swiftly through these streets, plain as the house from which it came, regal with a royalty beyond that of kings; the ceaseless charity untold; the strong, sustaining heart of private friendship; the sacred domestic affection that must not here be named; the eloquence which, like the song of Orpheus, will fade from living memory into a doubtful tale; that great scene of his youth in Faneuil Hall; the surrender of ambition; the mighty agitation and the mighty triumph with which his name is forever blended; the consecration of a life hidden with God in sympathy with man—these, all these, will live among your immortal traditions, heroic even in your heroic story. But not yours alone. As years go by, and only the large outlines of lofty American characters and careers remain, the wide republic will confess the benediction of a life like this, and gladly own that if with perfect faith, and hope assured, America would still stand and "bid the distant generations hail," the inspiration of her national life must be the sublime moral courage, the all-embracing humanity, the spotless integrity, the absolutely unselfish devotion of great powers to great public ends, which were the glory of Wendell Phillips.

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